

SMOLLETT'S DEFENCE OF DR. SMELLIE IN *THE CRITICAL REVIEW*

by

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SOME RATHER CONVINCING internal evidence supports Professor Knapp's argument that 'it is all but certain' Smollett reviewed Elizabeth Nihell's *A Treatise on the Art of Midwifery*,¹ a piece in which Mrs. Nihell attacked the obstetrical theories of Dr. William Smellie who, in his *Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Midwifery*, advocated the superiority of male midwives and the efficacy of instruments in child-birth. While the arguments for Smollett's having possibly reviewed this assault on the theories of his friend and teacher rely primarily on his relationship with Smellie and on his knowledge of obstetrics,² two pieces of stylistic evidence in the review itself clearly indicate that Smollett was its author: (1) verbal echoes of Smollett's review of Smellie's *Treatise* in the *Monthly Review* for 1751 and (2) the use of a strong visual analogy, the kind which Smollett drew so often in his reviews in the *Critical Review* for 1756 and which helps distinguish his pen from those of Armstrong, Francklin, Murdoch, and Derrick.³

Of both their friendship and mutual professional respect we know that when Smellie was engaged in the publication of his *Treatise* in 1751 he asked Smollett to assist him in preparing the second volume for the press (for which Smollett wrote a receipt for fifty guineas 'in full consideration for one half the Copy Right') and most probably to write the introduction to the third volume.⁴ Certainly the passage defending Smellie's teaching method in the review reprinted below⁵ could only have been written by one intimately familiar with that doctor's pedagogy and practice. It recalls both Smollett's pointed emphasis on the value of experience and observation in his reviews of medical works in 1756 as well as the following comment in his *Monthly* review of Smellie's *Treatise*: ' . . . he [Smellie] asserts nothing that is not justified by his own experience, and fairly owns the circumstances of his own miscarriage, in those instances wherein his attempts have failed.'⁶

¹ *Critical Review*, March 1760, 9, 187-97.

² See Lewis Knapp, *Tobias Smollett: Doctor of Men and Manners*, Princeton, 1949, pp. 135-39, 226. Knapp feels that Smollett wrote this review and 'many similar to it' as a release from both his work on the *Universal History* and projecting his *Continuation of the Complete History of England*. See also Claude Jones, 'Tobias Smollett on the separation of the pubic joint in pregnancy', *Medical Life*, New York, 1934, 41, 302-5.

³ Dr. John Armstrong, Thomas Francklin, Patrick Murdoch, and Samuel Derrick are the 'four gentlemen of approved abilities' who shared reviewing responsibilities for vols. I and II of the *Critical Review* for 1756. See Derek Roper, 'Smollett's four gentlemen: the first contributors to the *Critical Review*', *RES*, 1959, 10, 38-44.

⁴ Jones, p. 302.

⁵ See below, p. 36.

⁶ *Monthly Review*, 1751, 5, 465.

For internal evidence that suggests Smollett as the probable author of the review in question, we must first look at another passage in Smollett's review of Smellie's *Treatise*, one which verbally anticipates the Nihell review in the *Critical* and which, again, could only have been written by one thoroughly familiar with obstetrical theory and Smellie's work in particular. Smollett lauds Smellie in the *Monthly* as

. . . the first writer, who upon mechanical principles hath demonstrated the different modes of operation, in all the emergencies of practice: he, in a very minute manner, recommends and describes the use of the forceps, as he himself hath improved that instrument, and then proceeds to give a detail of other expedients used in the practice of *midwifery*, some of which he hath also rendered more commodious; and *tho' he has laid repeated injunctions on the young practitioner, to avoid as much as possible the use of instruments, he has likewise proved beyond all contradiction, that in some cases, they are absolutely necessary for the preservation of the patient's life: . . .*⁷ [my italics]

This concluding argument is repeated in the review of Mrs. Nihell's work:

. . . this honest woman who talks so much of tenderness, delicacy, and decency, sets up her throat, and with the fluency of a fishwoman, exclaims against the whole body of male-practitioners, as ruffians who never let slip the smallest opportunity of tearing and massacring their patients with iron and steel instruments. *This assertion is contrary to truth, that no man-midwife of any reputation ever advised instruments except in the last extremity.*⁸ [my italics]

and again,

She repeatedly declares that the use of instruments is never, no never, required in midwifery. *All honest practitioners have owned that instruments are very seldom necessary, and that they ought never to be used except in the utmost extremity.*⁹ [my italics]

While Smollett commends Smellie's 'air of candour, humanity, and moderation' in the former review, he deplores Mrs. Nihell's ignorance, lack of 'common sense,' 'common candour,' and indelicacy.

The reviewer's comparison of Mrs. Nihell's pomposity with both the noisy drum preceding the prize fighter and the pitch of the 'embroidered mountebank' recalls Smollett's stylistic preference for analogy in the 1756 reviews. Indeed, an examination of the reviews written for that year reveal that Smollett used this rhetorical device over thirty-three times while it turned up but nine times in the combined efforts of the other four reviewers. I would add that the first paragraph of the Nihell review also recalls both Smollett's delight in the pun and his frequent allusions to Horace which are evident throughout the 1756 reviews.¹⁰

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 466.

⁸ *Critical Review*, March, 1760, 9. 190.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

¹⁰ Typical of the way Smollett varied his use of analogy are these following passages from three of his reviews for 1756. Arguing that William Shebbeare betrayed his subject by attempting to prove too much, Smollett writes:

We remember to have seen an old sybil, that used to sweep the passage into the *Park*, she was wont to raise her spirits with a cordial, and than curse the higher powers in public. She raised contributions of halfpence with great success from the transient individuals of a certain party: and laid her account with being maintained at the public expense, should she ever deserve the regard of justice. For some time she proceeded in this strain without having the good fortune to be noticed, till at last growing outrageous, in consequence of being overlooked, she was conveyed before a magistrate, who committed her to *Bridewell*, where she was severely scourged and kept to short commons and hard labour, until she had sweated out all her regard for the pope and pretender.

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In the November number for 1760 Mrs. Nihell's *Answer to the Author of the Critical Review* was tersely and summarily reviewed.¹¹ The invective and similar use of pun and analogy (the reviewer here compares her work to a monstrous birth) suggests Smollett as the probable reviewer of this piece as well.

Following are reprinted the reviews of Mrs. Nihell's *A Treatise on the Art of Midwifery* and *An Answer to the Author of the Critical Review*.

A Treatise on the Art of Midwifery. Setting forth various Abuses therein, especially as to the Practice with Instruments: the Whole serving to put all rational Inquirers in a fair Way of very safely forming their own Judgment upon the Question; which it is best to employ, in Cases of Pregnancy and Lying-in, a Man-Midwife, or, a Midwife. By Mrs. Elizabeth Nihell, professed Midwife.

If a pun may be allowed in discussing a ludicrous subject, we would advise Mrs. Nihell to take, for a motto, in the next edition of this work, should it ever attain a reimpression:

Ex nihilo nihil fit!

In the dedication and preface of this curious performance, there is nothing very extraordinary but a few preliminary flashes of that explosion against men-midwives, which makes such a dreadful noise through the whole body of the work, and the author's declaration, that her husband is, unhappily for her, an apothecary: for our parts, we cannot conceive a more natural conjunction than that of an apothecary and a midwife, who, should they club their understandings in order to entertain the public, will hardly ever fail of producing a fine gossiping performance, like that which now lies before us. We must own, however, we have seldom known so much *crepitation* in a nurse's lecture except when she had made too free with the caudle, and mixed some extraneous ingredients in the composition for the expulsion of wind. As we cannot, in charity, suppose this was the case with Mrs. Nihell, or her husband, we cannot help conjecturing that this good gentlewoman has employed some eructitious disciple of Paracelsus Bombast, to inflate her stile, and *bouncify* her expressions. Thus have we seen a noisy drum precede the silent prize-fighter, who parades on horseback in his white shirt with ribbons bound, brandishing his naked back-sword as a cartel of defiance to the whole universe, displaying a patched head and seamed countenance, as undoubted proofs of his prowess: or, which is perhaps more to the purpose thus have we seen the embroidered mountebank produced on high-erected

—Had she been a more dignified character, perhaps her ears might have been nailed to the pillory. From the review of William Shebbeare's *A Third Letter to the people of England, on liberty, taxes, and the application of public money*.

The piece before us is one of those *mummified* compositions; and indeed it resembles a modern mummy in another respect: for, tho' it wears the garb of an old *Aegyptian*, the stuff is of a very late manufacture, and the taste and flavour very different from those of a genuine antique. (From the review of *Hydros, Disputatio Medica*.)

But this is a disagreeable subject, on which, for his sake, we shall not expatiate: though we must observe, that the ad——1 has been unlucky in his choice of a champion, who like *assafoetida* in medicine, cannot help discovering himself by the nauseous flavour of his writings. (From the review of *A Letter to Ad ——1 B g. With the form of a confession suited to a person in his circumstances*. Etc.)

¹¹ *Critical Review*, May, 1760, 9, 412.

stage, where he stands patiently to hear his eulogium pronounced by his own subaltern, whom he has hired in the double capacity of orator and merry-andrew. 'Gentlemen and ladies (cries he to the surrounding mob) be pleased to cast your eyes on this phoenix of physic; this mirror of science! this profundity of erudition! this miraculous, immaculate, unconceivable and unborn doctor, who has travelled through the deserts of Barca, the snows of Muscovy, and studied twelve years, without once opening his mouth, in the famous university of Lapland; who has cured the great Prester John, cham of Tartary, of a venereal tetter, and delivered the empress of Aethiopia of a living monster, without either knives, saws, scythes, crotchets, or hatchets. Were I to enumerate all the stupendous cures he hath performed; were I but to expatiate upon the virtues, the energy, the supernatural efficacy of this little plaister, gentlemen and ladies, please to take notice—This here specific plaister (sold for Three-pence) is not, like the plaisters of those fellows who call themselves regulars, composed of Burgundy pitch and t—: no, gentlemen and ladies, it is composed of choice balsams, gums, and essences, extracted from the aromatic productions of Arabia foelix:—in a word, gentlemen and ladies, were I to recount all the qualities of this little Three-penny plaister, I should talk from the rising of the sun to the setting thereof, and not speak half its praise.'

But before we proceed farther in the investigation of this piece, let us premise a doubt which hath this instant struck our imagination. Is not this what the Greeks called Σκιμαρχία, fighting a shadow. Perhaps there is no such person as Mrs. Nihell, and this name is assumed as an emblem of the non-entity. Every body knows that *nihil* signifies *nothing*; and any body may soon see that this treatise is *nothing* to the purpose. Many people remember to have seen and heard the celebrated Pinkethman speak a prologue, in the character of *No-body* on the back of an ass. Now, why may not this treatise on midwifery be a *hum* in the character of *No-thing*, brayed through the organs of the same animal? If taken in this sense, it may pass for a tolerable pun; and let me tell you, puns are authorized (no offence to the spirit of John Dennis) both by Homer and Horace. On the other hand, if we attempt to understand this treatise seriously, we must reject it by the lump, as the incoherent effusion of lunatic, not lucid. Would any person not insane, bring together such groupes of circumstances as we find marked in the contents? 'A Egyptians not so simple as Dr. Smellie pretends. —Manual operation, a science fitted for the men—Instruments, their use peculiar to the men—Dr. Smellie's doll-machine—Ignorance of the women—Story of a woman's child killed with a crotchet—*This story had been still more remarkable, if the child had not been a woman's child*—Story of a dentist—A man-midwife's toilette—Story of a child horribly murdered—*Pudendist*, a name in the stile of oculist or dentist, more proper for a male-practitioner of midwifery than *Accoucheur*'—*Proh! Pudor, could such a remark drop from the pen of a real woman? Would a grave matron have thrown out such a ludicrous hint of gross obscenity? The oculist takes his name from the eye, the dentist his from the teeth, and consequently, the man-midwife ought to derive his from the———*. *Fie, for shame! a woman, that is a sober woman, could never have talked in this manner; indeed, we know not which most to admire, the indecency or ignorance of the insinuator. The oculist undertakes to cure disorders of the eye; the dentist, to remedy the defects and distempers of the teeth: but, surely, the business of a man-midwife is not to cure*

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maladies incident to the pudenda; therefore the appellation would be absurd—But to return to our table of contents—'Triumph of a man-midwife—Why young practitioners should conceal their instruments—Prevalence of the fashion—Story of a woman ashamed of having been lain by a midwife—Inoculation justified—The greatest lady of Britain no example in favour of accoucheurs—Dr. Smellie's commandment to his pupils against immodesty—No stress laid on the rabbit-woman of Godalmin—Attitude indecent, and to no end or purpose—A stone of more virtue than a man-midwife, &c. &c.'

The reader can hardly expect, that we should enter into a minute detail, or formal refutation, of an extravagant fustian rhapsody, without science, method or meaning, poured forth in order to defame the male-practitioners in the art of midwifry; all of whom, without exception, are here abused as avaritious, interested miscreants, mongrels, false, indecent, cruel, barbarous, bloody, butcherly, ignorant, and by nature absolutely incapable of performing an office, which the God of nature intended for the female sex. An office, from which mankind are so wholly excluded, that rather than Adam should pretend to deliver his wife Eve, this good author supposes, that God infused in her knowledge sufficient of the manner of delivering herself. As a farther proof of their being excluded from this practice, we are referred to a certain chapter in Exodus, in which it is related, that Pharaoh said to the midwives, 'When ye do the office of midwife to the Hebrew women, and set them upon the stools, if it be a son, then ye shall kill him; but if it be a daughter, she shall live.' 'Why, cries our author, did not Pharaoh give the same order to the men-midwives, if there had been any such employed?' This is, to be sure, an irrefragable proof that there were no men-midwives in those days among the AEgyptians, who excelled all the world in arts and sciences:—and, she might have added, were so religious as to worship dogs and cats, and calves, leeks, and onions.

We might have allowed this treatise to pass without any other lash than that of ridicule, had simple ignorance been its sole demerit; but there is such a mixture of presumption and malice incorporated with the whole, that it requires a more severe chastisement. First, then, with respect to candour, this honest woman who talks so much of tenderness, delicacy, and decency, sets up her throat, and, with the fluency of a fish-woman, exclaims against the whole body of male-practitioners, as ruffians who never let slip the smallest opportunity of tearing and massacring their patients with iron and steel instruments. This assertion is so contrary to truth, that no man-midwife of any reputation ever advised instruments except in the last extremity.—She affirms, that a man-midwife is neither physician, surgeon, nor apothecary, but an ignorant fellow, often a bungling mechanic, who pays a few pieces for attending a course of lectures, and then sets up for a complete accoucheur, with his bag of hardware at his back. It is almost superfluous to contradict such a palpable falsehood. The male-practitioners of midwifry are all regularly bred physicians, surgeons, or apothecaries, who have studied this art, together with other branches of medicine: the difference then between the male-practitioner who has attended lectures, and the female who has not, is this; the first understands the animal oeconomy, the structure of the human body, the cure of distempers, the art of surgery, together with the theory and practice of midwifery, learned from the observations of an experienced

artist, and the advantage of repeated delivery: the last is totally ignorant of every thing but what she may have heard from an ignorant nurse or midwife, or seen at the few labours she has attended. She insinuates that the modesty of a woman is violated, and her person shamefully exposed by male-practitioners. The chastest and most delicate matrons of this great metropolis will give the lie to this imputation, and declare upon their own knowledge, as we do upon ours, that the business is carried on with much more ease and decorum by the men than by the women-practitioners, excepting such of these last as have been educated under male-artists. It is diverting enough to hear a woman talk of delicacy in these points, who owns, that she was bred in the Hotel Dieu at Paris, the most dirty, slovenly, inconvenient, indecent, shocking receptacle for the sick in all Europe. This candid Mrs. Nihell accuses Dr. Smellie of certain ridiculous exhibitions, which we know to be false; such as representing the uterus, by a bladder filled with beer, which, by means of a cork and piece of packthread was tapped occasionally. We know not what sort of liquor our author may have tapped; but, perhaps, the best excuse that could be offered for this assertion would be, that she had got her beer aboard. As she pecks continually at Dr. Smellie, we shall aver in our turn, that she either does not know that gentleman's method of teaching, or scandalously misrepresents it. All the anatomical part of the art he constantly demonstrated on the human subject, of which he had a great variety at command, both dead and living; his pupils learned the practice by attending real labours, and delivering in their turns, under the inspection of a regular-bred woman midwife: the doctor himself was present at all difficult or praeternatural cases; and with respect to his machinery, which this goodwoman endeavours to depreciate, under the denomination of a wooden statue and wax doll, it was such as did honour to his contrivance and execution; upon which he fairly demonstrated many cases in midwifery, of which Mrs. Nihell seems to have no idea.

In order to defame male practitioners, she endeavours to prejudice public charities, by boldly pronouncing that male pupils are taught this art upon the women admitted into the Lying-inn [*sic*] Hospital; an untruth that favours equally of rancour and presumption—She lays it down as a maxim and eternal truth, that nature has denied to the male sex that sympathy, tenderness, and faculty of feeling so necessary in midwifery, with which it hath indulged every female heart and hand: that man, compared to woman in this respect, is as one to ninety-nine, even though he should be possessed of all the improvements which art and practice could give, and she in a state of illiterate nature. This modest position requires no answer: but we believe ninety-nine in a hundred of her own sex will laugh at it as a foolish rhodomontade, which perhaps she learned of some Gascon pupil which she practised in that delicate school of tenderness the Hotel Dieu.

With respect to our author's ignorance, it might be detected in many articles both of omission and commission: for, whoever expects to find a complete system of midwifery in this book will be miserably disappointed: of all the defective treatises on the art, this is the most deplorably deficient. Indeed it appears that the author's aim was abuse, not instruction. Some palpable instances of her ignorance in commission it will not be amiss to disclose. The very basis of her performance is either a

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gross mistake arising from ignorance, or a wilful misrepresentation flowing from a worse motive. She repeatedly declares that the use of instruments is never, no never, required in midwifery. All honest practitioners have owned that instruments are very seldom necessary, and that they ought never to be used except in the utmost extremity: but every person conversant with the operations of nature in general, and with the different conformations of the human machine in particular, know that there are *lusus*, irregularities, and disorders, for which nature has made no provision; and which, if left to nature, or the *nimble, shrewd, and sensitive fingers* of the midwife, will infallibly occasion the death of both mother and child. Whoever denies this, must either be dead to common sense, or lost to common candour, and may as reasonably affirm, that when a child is born without a perforated anus, it must be left to nature, assisted by the *shrewd fingers* of the midwife. Whoever understands midwifery in any tolerable degree, must know that in some cases the concurrence of a very narrow pelvis in the mother, and a very large head in the child, render the birth absolutely impossible, without the aid of instruments. Suppose, for example, the distance between the os pubis and the jetting in of the last vertebra of the loins should not exceed two inches, and the narrowest diameter of the child's head should extend to about five, how is the five to pass through the two? as well may a cable pass through the eye of a needle—Oh! says Mrs. Nihell, this must be left to nature and the *shrewd fingers* of the midwife, which will mould and lengthen the head so as to fit it for the passage. Nature, doubtless will make wonderful efforts in this way, and so far as there is any prospect of success, no violence ought to be offered: but nature will not work impossibilities, when there is such a vast disproportion between the passage and the head; on the contrary, all her efforts, in this case, will serve only to compress the brain of the child, and wedge part of the head so closely in the passage as to bring on a gangrene in the parts of the mother already exhausted by hard labour. We should be glad to know what this learned matron would do in the case of a two-headed monster, a great hydrocephalus or dropsical head, a vast diseased protuberant ossification of the cranium, a dropsy of the lower belly, or a tumefied abdomen from putrefaction after death; or what she would do with an ordinary sized foetus inclosed in a distorted pelvis, in which the distance between the extremity of the sacrum and the share-bone did not exceed an inch. Many other examples might be specified, to prove that this female critic either does not speak candidly, or is not at all acquainted with her business in its full extent. If she never met with cases of such a nature, notwithstanding the myriads she has delivered in the Hotel Dieu, we pronounce that she is but half learned in her profession; and that if her share of practice in this country is not very much confined, she will one day find herself in a terrible dilemma, and even be obliged, if she acts according to the dictates of conscience and common sense, to have recourse to the assistance of the male-practitioner, whom she has here so virulently reviled: otherwise should she trust to the shrewdness of her fingers, woe be to the poor patient. The last instance we shall bring of this good woman's want of candour, is, that she inveighs against instruments by the lump, without knowing what they are, how they are distinguished, or in what manner they are used. It is all one to her whether the bistory, crotchet, scissars, or tire-tête, be applied; they are all equally destructive, and murder

and laceration must ensue. Nay, she goes even so far as to say, that if ever the forceps succeeded, it must have been in cases when the fingers alone would have succeeded much better; because the *long, nimble, taper, shrewd, sensible, palpating fingers* of an expert midwife, will always surely find admittance, where a clumsy, crooked, iron, steel, windowed and leathered instrument of two blades can be introduced. Now, if she spoke from experience and integrity, she would say, that in some cases when one finger of the hand, though no more than a quarter of an inch in diameter, cannot possibly be introduced; or, if it were, could be of no service either in turning or bringing down the head of the child, a blade of the forceps being less than half that diameter, may be insinuated one on each side of the head, so as to embrace it with a firm and steady grasp; and these blades being properly joined at the handles, will give the operator such an advantage, as, if properly managed, cannot fail of having a happy effect on both mother and child.

We will now take notice of some paragraphs in this curious treatise, which will, we apprehend, ascertain the measure of knowledge with which she, or her understrapper, has sat down to write against the men practitioners of midwifery. Page 90. 'A woman practitioner (says this sage lady) will patiently, even to sixteen, to eighteen hours, where an extraordinary case requ[ir]es so extraordinary a length of time, keep her hands fixedly employed in reducing and preserving the uterus in a due position, so as that she may not lapse the critical favourable moment of extraction, or of assisting the expulsive effort of nature.'—Without insisting upon the absurdity of keeping the uterus in a due position with both hands in the vagina, we shall only appeal to common sense for the effects of both hands *fixedly* employed for eighteen hours in the vagina, that part endued (as she herself in another place observes) with the most exquisite sensibility; what but inexpressible torture to the woman, fever, inflammation, and probably gangrene, the harbinger of death. Let a husband, or a parent, figure to himself a midwife's two hands thus employed for eighteen hours together, without intermission, for a purpose in itself ridiculous and absurd, and then determine with what reason this good woman exclaims against the cruelty of men-midwives.

Page 98. Mrs. Nihell, or her scribe, fairly attributes to the organ of conception an instinctive influence, which acts as an intuitive guide in the art of midwifery. We should be glad to know in what manner, and by what channel, the directions of this intuitive guide are communicated; whether it operates by the medium of gripes and eructations, like the spirit which formerly inspired the French prophets; or by exciting rapturous sensations in the seats of generation, from whence the brain derives oracular inspiration. This being the case, we suppose Mrs. Nihell will allow, that the whole organ of conception is endued with the greatest sensibility, will *cateris paribus*, turn out the completest midwife. What pity it is, that this intuitive guide should not also have the faculty of distinguishing noxious objects, to the effects of which it is often, in a peculiar manner, exposed. Our author's hypothesis concerning this mystery, is illustrated by the following curious note, which the reader, no doubt, will own is an incontestible proof of her learning and sagacity.

'It is evidently this universal influence of the uterus over the whole animal system, in the female sex, that Plato has in view in that his description of it, which Mr.

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Smellie (introd. p. 15.) calls *odd* and *romantic*, from his not making due allowance for the figurative stile of that florid author. Thus the diffusion of the energy of the uterus, Plato calls its "*wandering up and down thro' the body.*" A power of activity which, towards conquering the otherwise natural coldness of the female constitution, nature would hardly give to the uterus merely to excite in women a desire, sanctified under due restrictions, by her favorite end, that of propagation, if she had not, at the same time, endowed that uterus with an instinct, beneficial by its influence in the preservation of the issue of that *desire*. And the real truth is, that there is something that would be prodigious, if any thing natural could be properly termed prodigious, in that supremely tender sensibility with which women in general are so strongly impressed towards one another in the case of lying-in. What are not their bowels on that occasion? It may not be here quite foreign to remark, in support of the characteristic importance of the *uterus* or the *womb*, that in the ancient Saxon language the word *man* or *mon* equally signified one of the male or female sex, as *homo* in Latin. But for distinction-sake the male was called *weopon-man* (not however for any offensive weapon or *instrument* in midwifery;) and the female *womb-man*, or man with an uterus: from whence by contraction the word *woman*.'

Page 259, we apprehend this learned midwife has forgot herself in the following paragraph: 'As to the preternatural delivery, the better practice is not to delay the extraction of the foetus after the discharge of the waters; nor stay till her strength shall have been exhausted. On the presenting of a fair hold, and a sufficient overture, no difficulty should be made of extracting.' But, suppose a fair hold does not present, what is then to be done?—leave her till nature presents a fair hold. In that case we may stay *till the patient's strength is exhausted*, and the labour-pains have no longer any efficacy. What is now to be done? Will nature present a fair hold after she is exhausted? Truly, Mrs. Nihell, we cannot see through what overture you will deliver yourself from this dilemma, unless you have recourse to the man-midwife's *bag of hardware*.

This new Cleopatra in the obstetric art, prescribes, in case of 'considerable loss of blood after delivery, followed with faintings and oppressions, that the patient should be stirred, excited to cough and sneeze, contributively to the evacuation of the blood; which otherwise is apt to clot in the uterus, and would suffocate her if not expelled.' If there is any extraneous substance in the womb, which can be supposed to hinder it from contracting, such as a portion of the placenta, or any large mass of coagulated blood, it ought certainly to be removed: but in cases of an haemorrhage, where the impetuosity of the blood flowing through the orifices of the vessels, hinders them from closing, the method prescribed by our author will, doubtless, increase the impetuosity and the haemorrhage, and, generally speaking, finish the tragedy; whereas the patient's life might be saved by keeping her quiet and cool, and proper applications to the loins and abdomen.

As a specimen of this lady's boasted delicacy, both in matter and stile, we shall insert one of her paragraphs, and leave it to the reader's determination.

'I have myself known women in pain, and even before their labour pains came on, find, or imagine they found, a mitigation of their complaints, by the simple application of the midwife's hand; gently chafing or stroaking them: a mitigation which, I presume,

they would have been ashamed to ask, if they had been weak enough to expect it, from the delicate fist of a great-horse-godmother of a he-midwife, however softened his figure might be by his pocket night-gown being of flowered calico, or his cap of office tied with pink and silver ribbons; for I presume he would scarce, against Dr. Smellie's express authority, go about a function of this nature in a full-suit, and a tie-wig.'

How far Mrs. Nihell's shrewd, supple, sensitive fingers, may be qualified for the art of titillation, we shall not pretend to investigate. But those women who are pleased with this operation before the pains come on, may certainly chuse their own operator, without affecting the art of midwifery: we cannot help thinking, however, that in this case the male practitioner would not be the most disagreeable, unless our author has talents that way which we cannot conceive.

P. 333, speaking of Dr. Smellie's chapter on the distortion of the pelvis, Mrs. Nihell says, 'He might as well suppose a frequent vitious conformation of the cheek-bones, as of those that form the pelvis.' If this is not a flagrant instance of ignorance, it must be something worse. Did this woman ever see a collection of skeletons? If she had studied her profession under Dr. Smellie, whom she has no often, and so impotently, and so blindly attacked, she would have seen a great number of female pelvis distorted. Had she examined the collection of any professed anatomist, she would have found many cases of misconformation in those parts: had she cast around her eyes, and observed such a number of ricketty children and crooked women as daily appear in and about this metropolis, she would have known, that the case of a distorted pelvis is no rarity, and, consequently, she could not have drawn such a ridiculous inference as this, *that a vitious conformation of the pelvis is as seldom met with as a vitious conformation of the cheek-bones*. An inference contrary to fact, and to the common reason of things. The cheek-bones are subject to no super-incumbent pressure; but the bones of the pelvis, in a sitting posture, sustain the whole weight of the head and body, consequently, if they are softened by any ricketty disorder, they must give way and be distorted.

P. 348, our author's management in case of obliquity in the uterus, is all ridiculous and unnecessary; such as her getting hold of the orifice of the uterus, and supporting it; taking care that the child should not engage itself too much:—*engage itself, where? in the uterus, where it is already; or in the passage where it ought to be*. Her reintroducing a finger, in order to prevent the pains, and hinder the orifice from sinking; causing her patients to lie upon their backs, because, if they sat upright, the uterus would overset. Is it possible that such nonsense as this can drop from the pen of a professed midwife? or, are these only the crude notions of some conceited novice, who shelters himself under her name? Of a piece with this theory, is her directing the footling extraction in all directions where the head does not present; and injunction founded upon ignorance, and pregnant with the most dangerous consequences: Her finding fault with an accoucheur, for endeavouring to forward the birth during the mother's pain, which is the only time most proper for his operation, being an effort of nature which he is to assist: her affirming, that the use of the forceps often compresses the brain in such a manner, that it escapes through the occipital cavity; an assertion that betrays gross ignorance, both of the instrument

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and the conformation of the human head.

We might instance many other parts of this work, in which the author's nakedness in point of knowledge appears: but what we have said will probably satisfy the reader. With respect to the disposition and stile of the piece, if we look for method and matter, we find nothing, but confusion and deficiency: if we expect argument, we must put up with the most extravagant raving and declamation against men-midwives, ignorant, clumsy, murderous, indecent Heteroclytes, &c. Abuse repeated in every page, in such a manner, that one would be tempted to believe the book was written by some person broke loose from Bedlam. The language, indeed, is very suitable to the matter, being compounded of gigantic metaphors, foreign idioms, uncouth and affected words; such as *tortorous, palpation, sexual, conceptacle, promptership, cherishment, transitoriness, instinctive repugnance, instrumentarian, occlusion, shrewdness of fingers, revoltingness, deflexions of the uterus, aberration from the right line, detortion, devarication, the head retrogading into the pelvis, premature ablactation, effemination, &c.*

An answer to the Author of the Critical Review, for March, 1760, upon the Article of Mrs. Nihell's Treatise on the Art of Midwifery. By Mrs. Elizabeth Nihell, professed Midwife.

Pray be easy, good madam, we are ready to grant whatever you require; even to acknowledge that your tongue is *sensible, shrewd, and voluble*, as thy fingers. It was never our intention to enter the lists with a lady, especially with a lady of your profession of whose skill in the weapons of altercation we could not be ignorant. We confess that you have here brought to light, forty pages of profound argumentation, which, hackneyed as we are in debate, we cannot pretend to answer in less than as many volumes and that you have delivered yourself of a monstrous birth, that fully evinces your dexterity in the obstetric art: may it, however, be the last of our begetting! Heaven preserve us from the heinous crime of fornication! What a snarling, tattling, gossiping urchin must that be, who owns a critic for his father, a midwife for his mother, and an apothecary, perchance, for his sponsor, or, what is worse, a *grub*, who feeds and fattens on the spoils of character and fair fame? Withhold thy insnaring arts good Mrs. Nihell! Tempt not frail virtue, and provoke not appetites already too ungovernable, but join with us in the words of our holy litany, *From such foul deeds, and crying sins, good Lord deliver us.*